

Curated by Daniele Balit, Katharina Scriba and Anne Zeitz

Sound Unheard

An Exhibition at the Goethe-Institut Paris

The exhibition *Sound Unheard* took place at the Goethe-Institut Paris/France from 13 September to 27 October 2019. It was curated by Daniele Balit, Katharina Scriba and Anne Zeitz. The exhibition was co-produced by the Gaîté Lyrique and realized in cooperation with the German Center for Art History in Paris. The following texts stem from the exhibition booklet and include the descriptions of the works as well as the biographies of the artists. The texts were written by Daniele Balit and Anne Zeitz.

Sound Unheard

The works brought together in the *Sound Unheard* exhibition are situated at the threshold of the audible. They question the thin line between the imperceptible and the perceptible, a space determined not only by our auditory abilities, but also by a number of social, cultural, political and technological factors.

The exhibition connects the foundational sound practices of Rolf Julius, Christina Kubisch and Terry Fox with more recent works by Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Nicholas Bussmann and Natascha Sadr Haghighian, Nina Canell, Moritz Fehr, Mario de Vega and Miki Yui. It aims to explore the field of determination of the audible by materializations of phenomena that remain inaudible, unheard or unheard of. The works in *Sound Unheard* slip into the gaps in our auditory attention to map the different encodings of the inaudible through transcriptions, amplifications, resonances or vibrations, sometimes to the point of revealing cracks and ruptures.

The spectrum of frequencies revealed by these works spans past and present, the sensorial and the political, meaning and sensation. The boundary between noise and silence which they contain can then signify both a form of suppression of dissent, a field in which to oppose the noise of the media cycle, as well as a parapraxis of listening – that which remains buried and which we have not listened to.

The inaudible and its different contexts are the subject of artistic practices seeking to measure its political and social stakes, in a register ranging from the investigative documentary form to poetic, discreet and non-spectacular sounds.

Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *Saydnaya (The Missing 19db)*, 2016

Saydnaya (The Missing 19db) documents, from an auditory perspective, the violence perpetrated at the Saydnaya secret prison located near Damascus in Syria. The work is part of an investigation conducted in collaboration with Amnesty International and the Forensic Architecture collective. Based on the testimonies of the few survivors of the prison, Abu Hamdan collects acoustic data (as the prisoners are for the most part plunged into darkness) from which he is able to reconstruct the prison architecture, its environment and the prisoners' living conditions. The number of people killed in this isolated high surveillance prison since the 2011 crisis is estimated at thirteen thousand. The light box consists of a set of decibel measurements that show a decrease in the ambient sound following the violent repression that took place in this enclave. According to accounts, the sound level of voices has become four times lower than before the revolutionary movements.

Fig. 01: Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *Saydnaya (The Missing 19db)*, 2016, C-print mounted on a light box, 243 x 305 x 10 cm, detail, Courtesy of the artist and mor charpentier, Paris, © Lawrence Abu Hamdan.

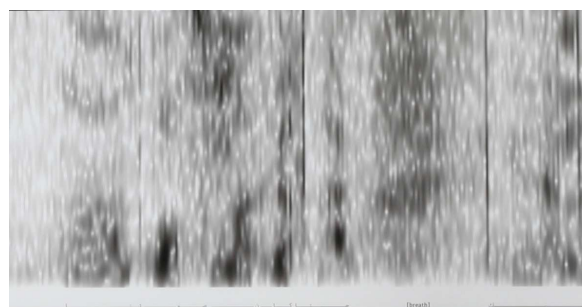




Fig. 02: Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *Saydnaya (The Missing 19db)*, 2016, C-print mounted on a light box, 243 x 305 x 10 cm, Courtesy of the artist and mor charpentier, Paris © Lawrence Abu Hamdan; and Nina Canell, *Thin Vowel*, 2019, Fibre-optic cable, 188 x 5 x 7 cm, Courtesy of the artist, © Nina Canell, exhibition view, photo: Anne Zeitz.

Fig. 03: Nicholas Bussmann and Natascha Sadr Haghighian, *Singing Yesterday's News Again*, 2017, Multichannel sound installation, printed document, Courtesy of the artists, © Nicholas Bussmann and Natascha Sadr Haghighian, exhibition view, photo: Anne Zeitz.



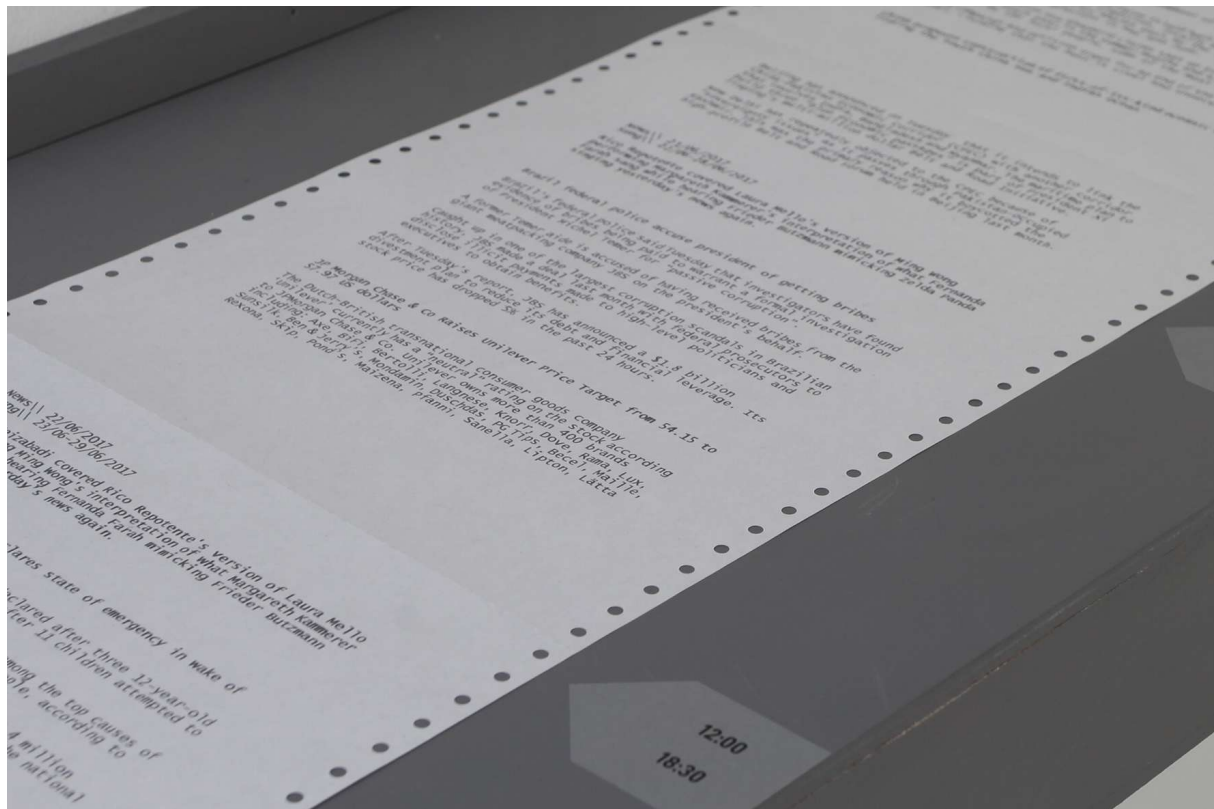


Fig. 4: Nicholas Bussmann and Natascha Sadr Haghighian, *Singing Yesterday's News Again*, 2017, Multichannel sound installation, printed document, Courtesy of the artists, © Nicholas Bussmann and Natascha Sadr Haghighian, exhibition view, photo: Anne Zeitz.

For Abu Hamdan, this reduction in the noise level, measured at 19 decibels, evokes both the voices those suffering and their disappearance: a means of remembering them and a proof of their existence.

Lawrence Abu Hamdan was born in 1985 in Amman and currently lives in Beirut. His audio investigations can take the form of legal assessments which he integrates into collaborative and interdisciplinary projects involving political and social issues. Abu Hamdan was one of the winners of the 2019 Turner Prize. Following the Sharjah Biennale, he participated in the Venice Biennale in 2019.

Nicholas Bussmann and Natascha Sadr Haghighian, *Singing Yesterday's News Again*, 2017

Singing Yesterday's News Again is a sound work based on the principle of a displaced vocal interpretation of the news report. Different singers perform an excerpt from the previous day's news, forming a constantly changing choir.

The work was originally produced to be aired for seven days during a radio broadcast on Savvy Funk during documenta 14 in 2017. Beginning from the first singer, each day a new singer covered the previous interpretation and so on.

In the installation presented at the Goethe-Institut, every half hour the seven voices are superimposed until they are conflated. The words and sentences from the news – charged with meaning by the events and conflicts they deal with – are thus transformed, become incomprehensible or even inaudible, making space for the visitor to hear the timbres and intonations that progressively combine. Bussmann and Sadr Haghighian disrupt the temporality and modes of attention associated with media strategies. Through repetitive and shifting vocals, they create an interpretation of current events that is both singular and collective, intuitive and formal.

Nicholas Bussmann is a German musician, composer and artist born in 1970 in Berlin, where he currently lives. His work is based on formal improvisations and structures of play. His durational performances

have been held in Berlin, Shanghai, Porto and Milan between 2014 and 2018. A solo exhibition of his work was recently presented at the Taxispalais Kunsthalle Tirol (2018). He regularly collaborates with Lucile Desamory, Martin Brandlmayr and Natascha Sadr Haghighian and also composes for film and radio productions.

Natascha Sadr Haghighian, or Natascha Süder Happelmann, according to the pseudonym adopted for her participation in the Venice Biennale in 2019 in which she represented Germany, was most likely born in the mid-1960s, although she casts doubt about her biography. Her projects often consist of collective contributions that determine both the concept and the form of her pieces around socio-political issues such as migration or the economics of the military. In 2014, Sadr Haghighian created the CV exchange platform bioswap.org as a way of questioning the system of monetary capitalization of artistic biographical data.

Nina Canell, *Thin Vowel*, 2019

Nina Canell's sculptures suggest phenomena of loss, erosion and dispersion in the infrastructure related to the transmission of signals. Like relics from the future, the fragments present in her works preserve, through their material fragility, the mystery of the accelerated space-times of today. *Thin Vowel* seems to want to coagulate a parasitic impulse in the high speeds and very long distances of transmission that can be achieved with fibre-optic cable, of which it is made. These conductive bodies, which are often at the centre of Canell's work, are reconfigured as a morphology of "relational textures in and through objects". Between the tangible and the intangible, the perceived and the imagined, these subtle bodies seem to reveal the sensory modulations through which their signals are encoded.

Born in 1979 in Växjö, Sweden, Nina Canell lives and works in Berlin. For over a decade, her sculptural language has explored the infra-tangible dimension of energy phenomena and their material with matter through forms ranging from organic to synthetic. She has participated in numerous group exhibitions, including the biennales of Venice, Sydney, Lyon and Liverpool. Her recent solo exhibitions have been presented

in the following venues, among others: the Staatliche Kunsthalle in Baden-Baden (2019), the Kunstmuseum in St. Gallen (2018), The Artist's Institute in New York (2017), the Centre d'art contemporain d'Ivry – le Crédac in Paris/Ivry-sur-Seine (2017).

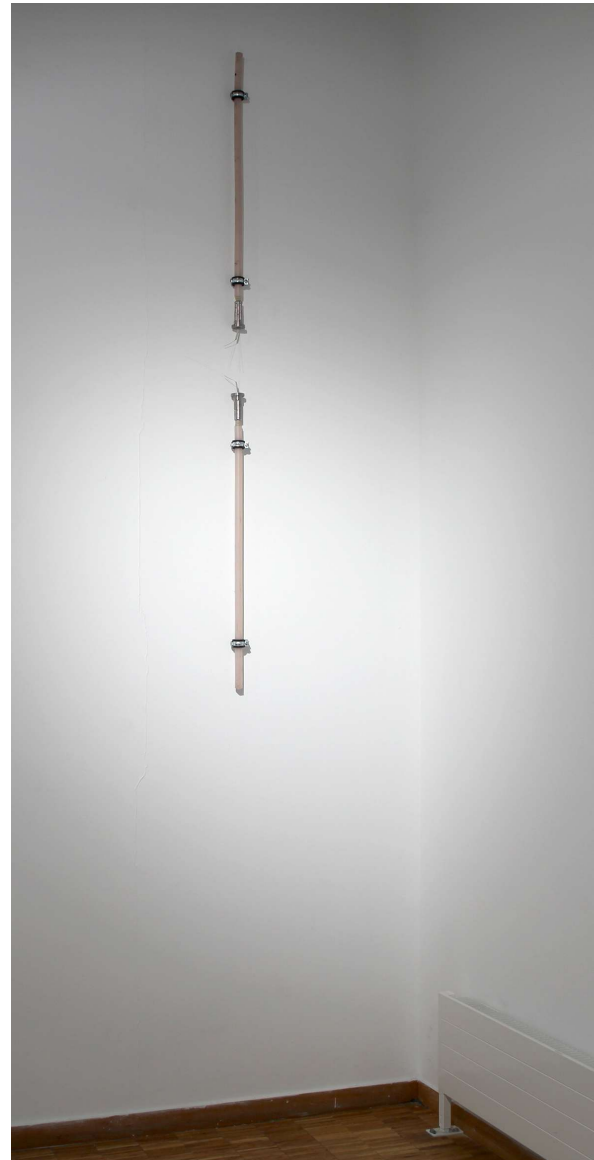


Fig. 05: Nina Canell, *Thin Vowel*, 2019, Fibre-optic cable, 188 x 5 x 7 cm, Courtesy of the artist, © Nina Canell, exhibition view, photo: Anne Zeitz.

Moritz Fehr, *Colosseum*, 2015

The film *Colosseum* documents a gold, silver and copper mine located in the Mojave Desert in California that has been abandoned since 1993. A former extraction site for raw materials used for cables and technological equipment (computers, hard disks, mobile



Fig. 06: Moritz Fehr, *Colosseum*, 2015, Stereoscopic 3D film, Ambisonics surround sound, video stills, Courtesy of the artist, © Moritz Fehr.

phones), this mine transformed the landscape in a way that is symbolic of the Anthropocene era under the influence of data communication, storage and sharing technologies.

By taking the viewer inside the mine through a sequence of spatial 3D images, *Colosseum* connects this contemporary landscape to the representations of infernal places painted by Botticelli or described by poets such as Dante and Virgil. Dante and Virgil's choir of hell is transformed into squeaking and buzzing generated by the electromagnetic fields of computers recorded by the artist. Recordings of the ambient sound around the mine are superimposed on these sounds

as well as an audio effect creating the perception of a perpetual fall (known as the Shepard scale) which, in counterpoint to the movement of the camera, contributes to the feeling of a descent into hell.

Moritz Fehr was born in Dortmund in 1981 and currently lives in Berlin. His works are based on the perceptual transformation of the spaces in which they are located, or on the reconstruction of environments through stereoscopic images and sound environments. Fehr's work has been presented at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston (2017), the Humboldt Forum in Berlin (2018) and the Velaslavasay Panorama in Los Angeles (2019), for which he has created a permanent installation.

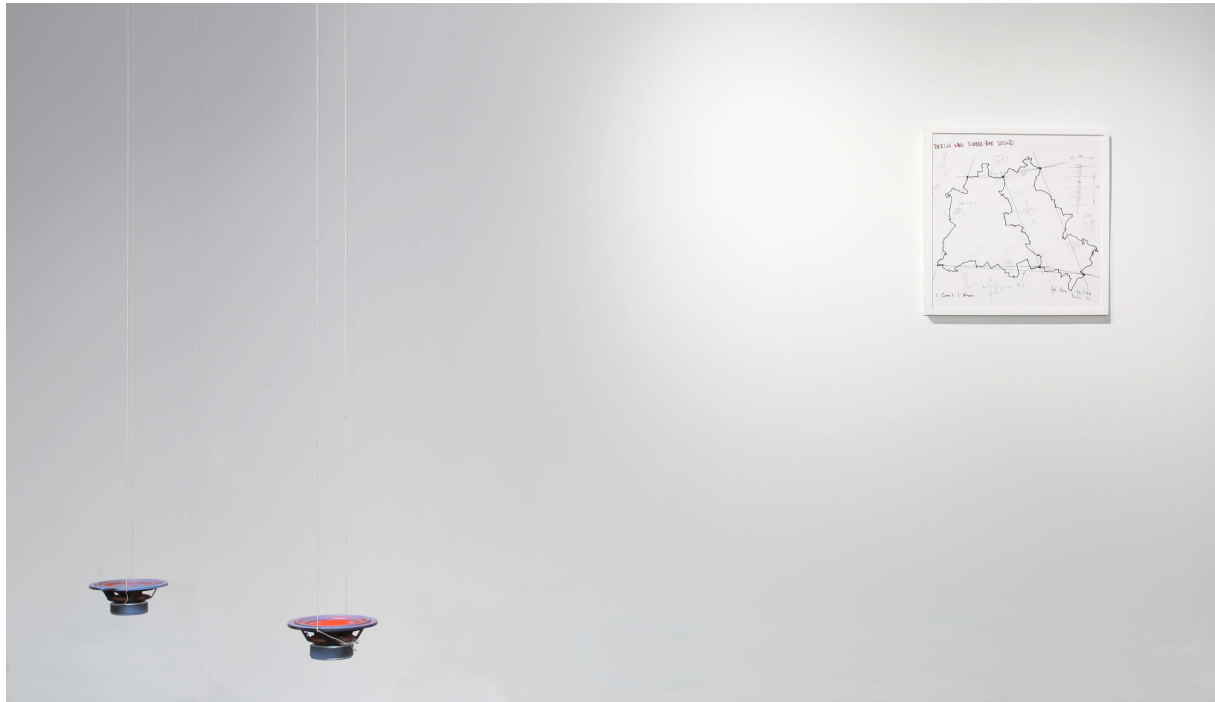


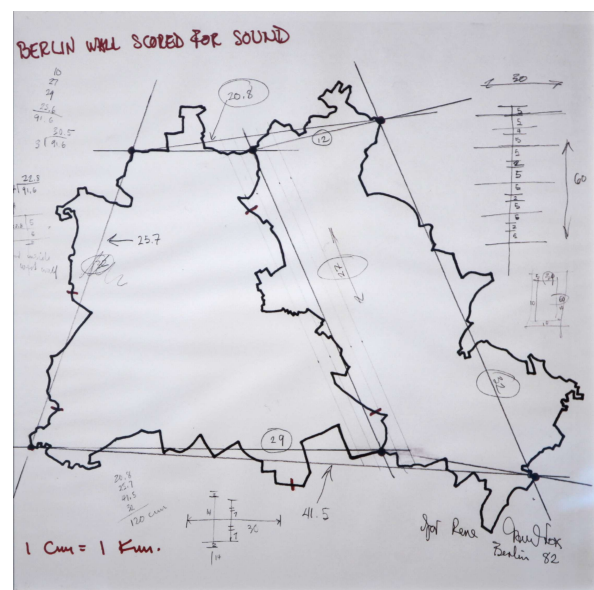
Fig. 07: Rolf Julius, *Orange Cello (Sound Cooking)*, 1984/2017, Two speakers, aerosol paint, amplifier, tape recorder, pigment, Courtesy estate rolf julius and Galerie Thomas Bernard, © estate rolf julius; and Terry Fox, *Berlin Wall Score*, 1982, Drawing and text, pencil and marker on paper (facsimile), 45.2 x 49.7 cm, Courtesy Estate Terry Fox, © Estate Terry Fox. Exhibition view photo: Anne Zeitz.

Terry Fox, *Berlin Wall Score*, 1982

In the early 1980s, during an artistic residency in the former western sector of the city, Terry Fox became interested in the Berlin Wall – located very close to his studio – which he observed and analysed in order to trace its topographical features and translate its structure into an “audible geography”. This research led to an ensemble of pieces entitled *Berlin Wall Scored for Sound*. These include drawings retracing the zigzag shape of the wall and the way in which it is integrated into the city, an installation around a piano string, as well as a sound work that was released on vinyl. In particular, Fox gives the listener the opportunity to hear the sounds of a military helicopter circling his place of residence and the sound of the neighbourhood recorded from his window. *Berlin Wall Score*, exhibited here, transcribes the forms of the wall in and around Berlin and indicates different segments that Fox isolates and redraws in another series of drawings that were conceived as musical scores. These different pieces make tangible the Cold War tensions, the effects of the separation of the city and the fragmented and individual way in which it was perceived.

Terry Fox (Seattle, 1943–Cologne, 2008) has been working since the 1960s with gestures and sounds, as well as language in different forms:

Fig. 08: Terry Fox, *Berlin Wall Score*, 1982, Drawing and text, pencil and marker on paper (facsimile), 45.2 x 49.7 cm, Courtesy Estate Terry Fox, Courtesy Estate Terry Fox and René Block, © Estate Terry Fox.



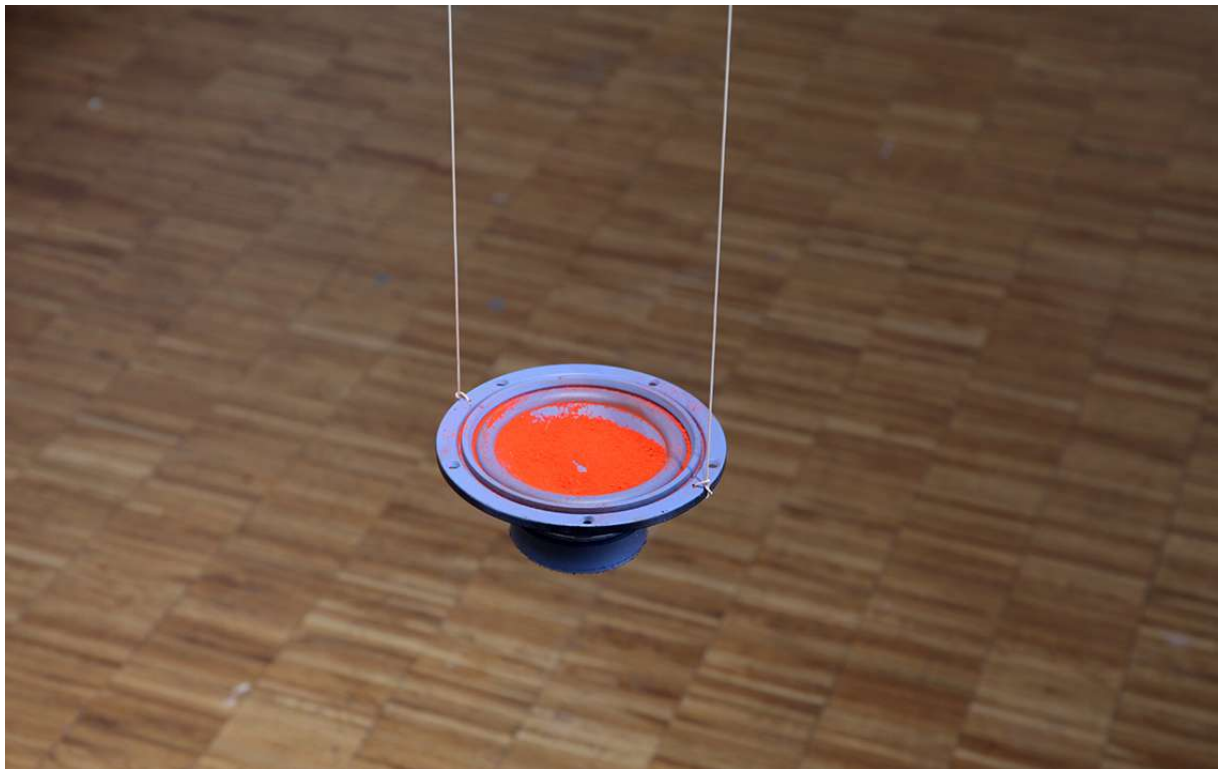
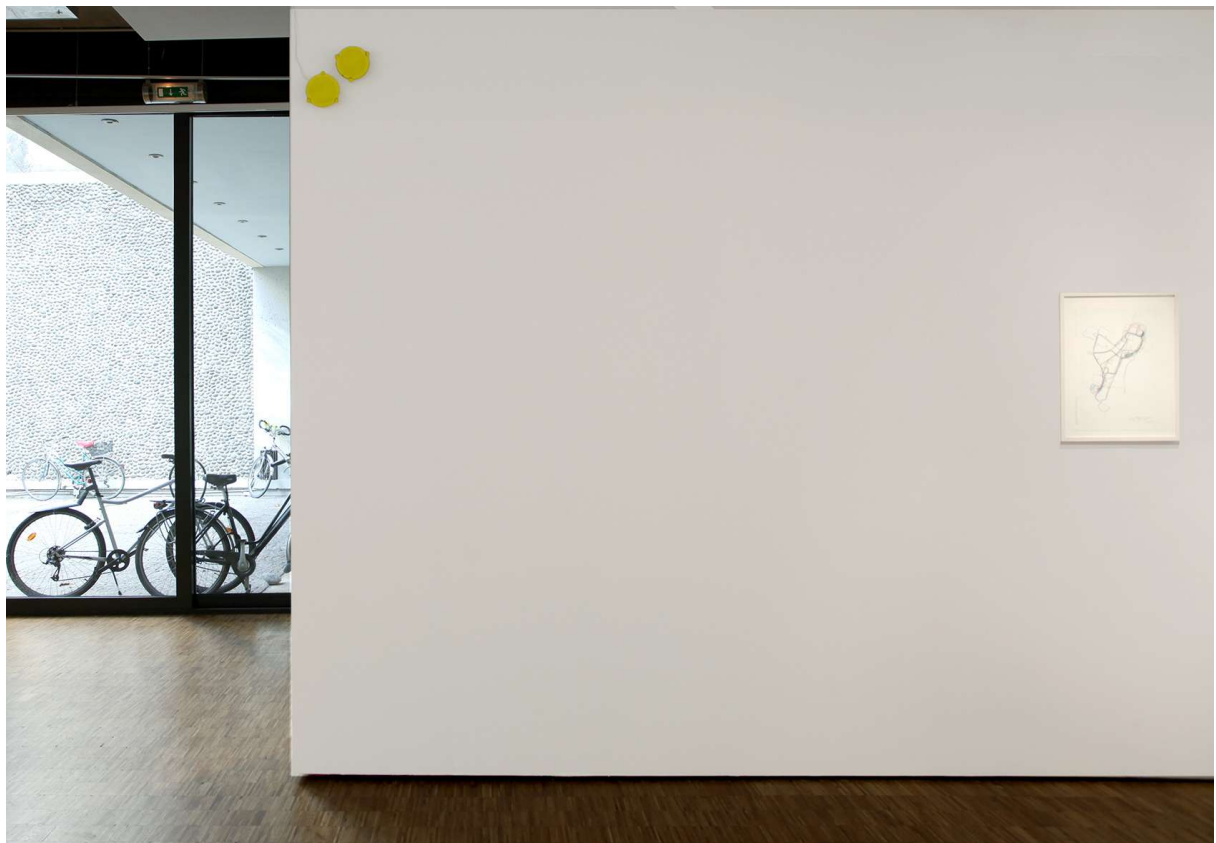


Fig. 09: Rolf Julius, *Orange Cello (Sound Cooking)*, 1984/2017, Two speakers, aerosol paint, amplifier, tape recorder, pigment, detail of the installation, Courtesy estate rolf julius and Galerie Thomas Bernard, © estate rolf julius, exhibition view, photo: Anne Zeitz.

Fig. 10: Rolf Julius, *Yellow Music Spot*, 1984, Two yellow speakers, amplifier, CD player. Courtesy estate rolf julius and Galerie Thomas Bernard, © estate rolf julius; and Christina Kubisch, *Quinze Parcours Magnétiques, Poitiers*, 2008, Drawing, 48 x 35 cm, Courtesy of the artist, exhibition view photo: Anne Zeitz.



sculptural, performative, installation and video, questioning physical and perceptual fragility. His works have been the subject of numerous monographs and international exhibitions. He participated in the 1984 Venice Biennale, the 1987 documenta 8 in Kassel and the 1990 Sydney Biennale. Between 2015-2017, a traveling exhibition was dedicated to his work, initiated by the Akademie der Künste in Berlin.

Rolf Julius, *Orange Cello (Sound Cooking)*, 1984/2017

Since the 1970s, Rolf Julius has been exploring fragile and discreet sounds through graphic, sculptural or performative forms. His installations dissect the act of listening and reflect the composition by mixing various sound and visual elements in order to deploy a very personal poetics of the sensorial experience. In *Orange Cello (Sound Cooking)* and *Yellow Music Spot*, elements such as loudspeakers, electrical cables and amplifiers are revealed as an integral part of the sculptural object in the exhibition space, participating in the perceptual experience proposed by Julius. One of the works is hung in an area at the top of the wall, the other is suspended by its own electrical cables: both date from the 1980s and make micro-tones audible while evoking minimal gestures and actions. “Sounds that wait, timbres that last, music that crumbles”, these are the terms of the score dated 1982 and exhibited in *Sound Unheard*. It illustrates the way in which Julius has constantly highlighted his “small sounds” by emphasizing the importance of the perception of what is barely visible, almost erased or at the threshold of the audible.

Born in northern Germany, Rolf Julius (1939–2011) was one of the leading figures in contemporary sound art. He always maintained a certain autonomy and distance through the constellation of both visual and sonic elements around which he developed his approach: pigments, powders, stones, metal, glass plates, loudspeaker membranes, electrical circuits – a “music for the eyes”, as one of his works is entitled. Beginning in the 1980s, Julius created numerous installations for museums and galleries in the United States, Japan, Europe and Canada.



Fig. 11: Rolf Julius, *(Untitled) Klänge die warten*, 1982, Ink, paper, pencil, 21 x 29.7 cm, Courtesy estate rolf julius and Galerie Thomas Bernard, © estate rolf julius.

Christina Kubisch, *Electrical Walks Paris, 2003 – (Paris version 2019) and Quinze Parcours Magnétiques, Poitiers, 2008*

Since the 1970s, Christina Kubisch has questioned the presence of the electromagnetic fields generated by the electronic networks surrounding us. While she first made them the constituent element of her sound installations, in the 2000s she also focused on their omnipresence in contemporary urban space. She then dedicated herself to the *Electrical Walks* that are invitations to explore these inaudible emanations from the city. For Kubisch, the inaudible is both material and subject, with the double meaning suggested by the term matter. Indeed, these acoustic materializations of electromagnetic fields also make it possible to question the role of electricity and frequencies in relation to

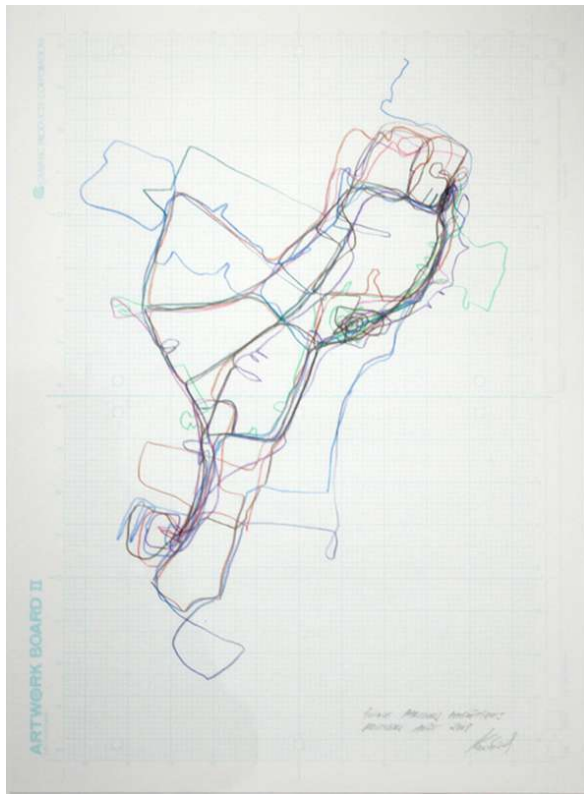


Fig. 12: Christina Kubisch, *Quinze Parcours Magnétiques, Poitiers*, 2008, Drawing, Coloured pencil on paper, 48 x 35 cm, Courtesy of the artist, © Christina Kubisch.

the digital networks which structure the fields of finance, security or communication. *Electrical Walks Paris*, produced in a new version in Paris in the 3rd and 4th arrondissements, was presented by the Gaîté Lyrique as part of the *Inaudible Matters* project in partnership with *Sound Unheard*.

Christina Kubisch (born in 1948 in Bremen, lives in Hoppegarten in Brandenburg) has focused for the past forty years on the perception of inaudible and invisible phenomena. In the 1970s, she developed performative works before turning to forms of installation often based on translating electromagnetic fields into sound, while also incorporating luminescent elements. Recent exhibitions include those at the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco (2017) and the Musée des beaux arts de Rennes (2019).

Mario de Vega, *ABSENTIA*, 2012–19

In 2013, Mario de Vega had a bell made in the Zacualtipan de Ángeles region of Mexico, one of the last regions where bronze is still worked to cast bells in the



Fig. 13: Christina Kubisch, *Electrical Walks Paris*, 2019 . Photo: Christina Kubisch.

traditional way. With a diameter of nearly one metre and a weight of 600 kg, the bell – without its clapper – was intricately decorated and exhibited for the first time in Mexico City in 2014. The same year, the artist commissioned two craftsmen brothers to destroy the bell before it had even rung a single time. During 18 hours, the destruction into thirty-two pieces was done by various methods and techniques: mallets, fire, drops. In 2016, the pieces were buried in specific places identified by circles drawn by the artist on the map of the Mexican capital, similar to sound propagation lines. For Mario de Vega, the pieces scattered underground throughout the city became a permanent, invisible and inaudible installation. From production to dispersal, the process is documented through a collection of images gathered in a large photographic frieze, one of the forms that Mario de Vega gives to this project.

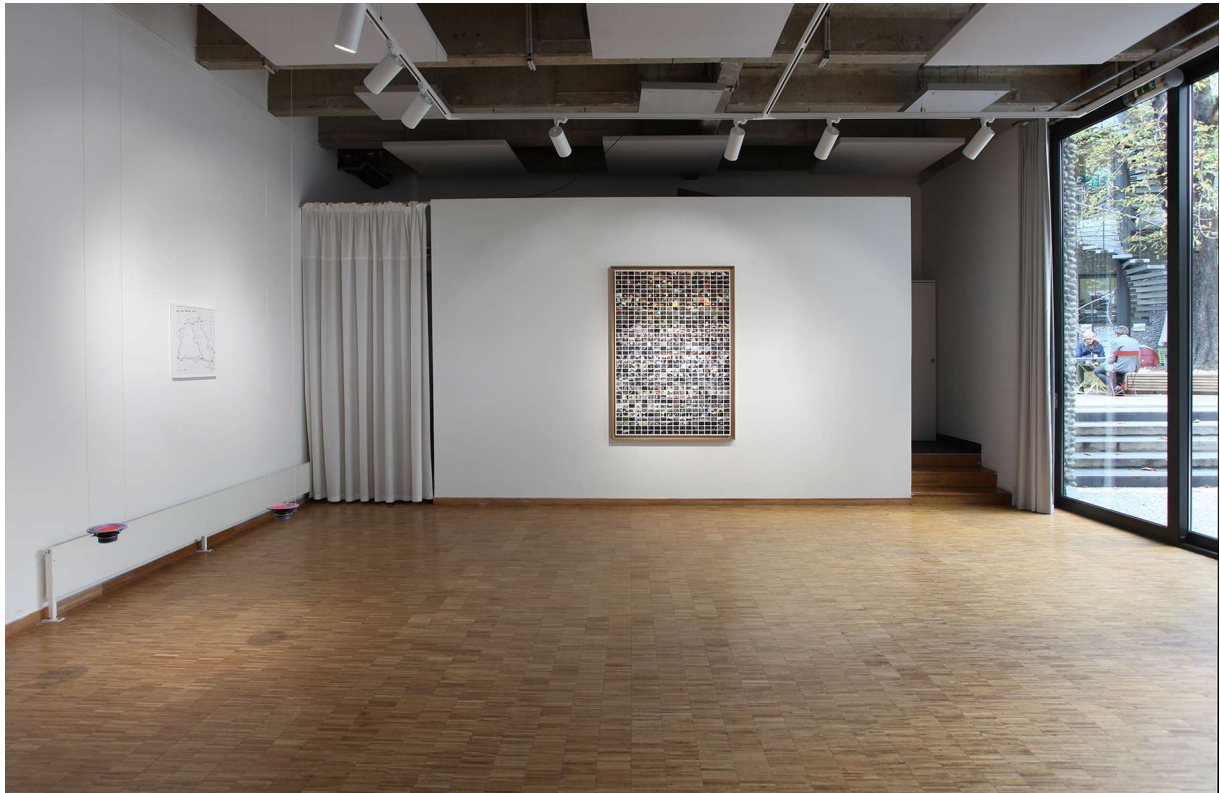
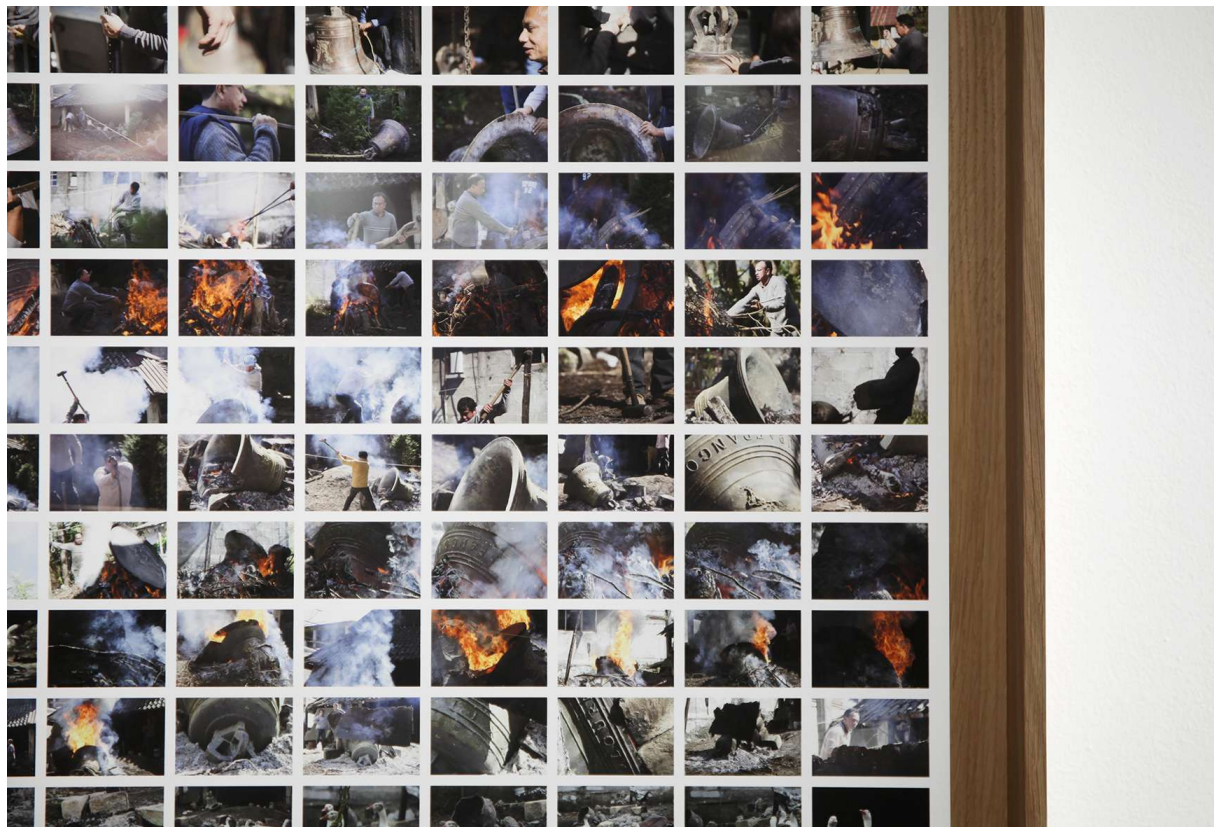


Fig. 14: Mario de Vega, *ABSENTIA*, 2012–19, Photographic print 111 x 152 cm, Courtesy of the artist, © Mario de Vega, exhibition view, photo: Anne Zeitz.

Fig. 15: Mario de Vega, *ABSENTIA*, 2012–19, Photographic print 111 x 152 cm, detail, Courtesy of the artist, © Mario de Vega, exhibition view, photo: Anne Zeitz.



Mario de Vega was born in 1979 in Mexico City and lives and works between Mexico City and Berlin. An artist and musician, his projects explore the thresholds of perception – from infrasound to the visual and sound effects of explosives – through different and often interconnected forms: concerts, actions, installations, works and recordings. A member of the P-Node project, he regularly collaborates with artists and musicians on his long-term projects, which were recently presented at OTOOTO in Tokyo (2019) and Das Weisse Haus in Vienna (2019).

Miki Yui, *Mamagoto - Mirror*, 2011

Like an archaeologist of the inaudible, Miki Yui explores the temporal layers left by sound events, exploring the space that gestures, acts and sound accidents create between the past and the future in the lived experience. The term *mamagoto* in Japanese refers to imitation, and in particular to a child's game that mimics the culinary practices of adults ("mamma" means food in Japanese, and in particular rice, while

"goto" means the thing, the act). Miki Yui's *Mamagoto* series is made from found materials which are transformed and explore different states. While the work begins with a performance in which the artist imitates actions and gestures such as cooking, or a divination table (such as the *Mamagoto - Mirror* version presented at the Goethe-Institut), the installation then appropriates sounds recorded during the performance, without excluding the ambient sound in the space.

The work thus documents a portion of time and space, in the artist's words. The sound recorded and looped by the installation then becomes "mamma", food for our imagination.

The artist, musician and composer, Miki Yui was born in Tokyo and is based in Dusseldorf since 1994. Her work, at the intersection of music, radio productions, drawing and installations, has been exhibited in Asia as well as in Europe, and recently in Latin America (Museo de Arte, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogota). Her sixth album *MILLS* was released in 2018 (Cuspeditons, Manchester). *Mamagoto* was

Fig. 16: Miki Yui, *Mamagoto - Mirror*, 2011, Mirror, broken cup, marble, audio player, 28 x 28 x 15 x 15 cm, Courtesy of Miki Yui, © Miki Yui.



recently presented as a performance at the Kunstpalast in Düsseldorf (2018) and a solo exhibition took place in Düsseldorf at the Raum für Kunst the same year.

Abstract

The exhibition *Sound Unheard* took place at the Goethe-Institut Paris/France from 13 September to 27 October 2019. It was curated by Daniele Balit, Katharina Scriba and Anne Zeitz. The exhibition connects the foundational sound practices of Rolf Julius, Christina Kubisch and Terry Fox with more recent works by Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Nicholas Bussmann and Natascha Sadr Haghghian, Nina Canell, Moritz Fehr, Mario de Vega and Miki Yui. *Sound Unheard* was co-produced by the Gaîté Lyrique and realized in cooperation with the German Center for Art History in Paris. The following texts stem from the exhibition booklet and include the descriptions of the works as well as the biographies of the artists. The texts were written by Daniele Balit and Anne Zeitz.

Authors and curators

Daniele Balit is an art historian, theoretician and curator. He teaches at the Institut Supérieur des Beaux-Arts de Besançon and is an associate researcher at TEAMeD/ Université Paris 8. He holds a PhD from Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne and was awarded a grant by the Centre national des arts plastiques (Cnap) for a research on the artist Max Neuhaus. He is the editor of *Max Feed — œuvre et héritage de Max Neuhaus* (Isba, 2018) and co-editor of the anthology *Les Pianos ne poussent pas sur les arbres, Max Neuhaus* (Presses du Réel, 2018), a founding member of the curatorial platform 1:1projects in Rome, of the collective OuUnPo, and the initiator of Birdcage, an itinerant and temporary sound gallery. His recent curatorial projects include *Wetlands Hero* (Cneai, 2015, co-curator), *Max Feed* (Frac Franche-Comté, 2016), *Mix-Feed* (Isba Besançon, 2017), *Sound Unheard*, Goethe-Institut Paris, 2019, co-curator).

Katharina Scriba studied communication and cultural management in Hamburg and Paris and has been responsible for the art and music programme at the Goethe-Institut Paris since 2011. In collaboration with partner institutions, galleries and freelance curators, she has realized and curated numerous solo and group exhibitions both in the gallery spaces of the Goethe-Institut and in various Parisian museums. The focus of her work is on the presentation of contemporary artists from Germany. The spectrum of artistic works presented is diverse in form and content. However, particular attention is paid to the expansion of the medium of photography and the presentation of innovative, experimental and process-oriented approaches. In addition to classical photographic works, she regularly presents drawings, video works, sculptures and installations.

Anne Zeitz is associate professor (maître de conférences) at University Rennes 2, a member of the Pratiques et théories de l'art contemporain (PTAC) research lab at Université Rennes 2 and an associate member of TEAMeD/Université Paris 8. Her recent research focuses on auditory attention and distraction in contemporary art and on practices and writings tackling the notions of the inaudible and the unheard. She received a research grant from the INHA and Institut Français in 2016 and is directing the research project *Sound Unheard* (including the co-organization of exhibitions at the Goethe-Institut Paris, the Musée des beaux-arts de Rennes and a performance programme at the Gaîté Lyrique in 2019).

Titel

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